

wherein:

n is at least 2,

each of L^1 - L^n is independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, hydroxy, (C_1-C_4) alkanoyl, naturally occurring nucleobases, non-naturally occurring nucleobases, aromatic moieties, DNA intercalators, nucleobase-binding groups, heterocyclic moieties, and reporter ligands, at least one of L^1 - L^n being said base substituted with at least one sterically bulky substituent;

each of C^1 - C^n is $(CR^6R^7)_y$ where R^6 is hydrogen and R^7 is selected from the group consisting of the side chains of naturally occurring alpha amino acids, or R^6 and R^7 are independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, (C_2-C_6) alkyl, aryl, aralkyl, heteroaryl, hydroxy, (C_1-C_6) alkoxy, (C_1-C_6) alkylthio, NR^3R^4 and SR^5 , where R^3 and R^4 independently are hydrogen, a conjugate, (C_1-C_6) alkyl, hydroxy- or alkoxy- or alkylthio-substituted (C_1-C_4) alkyl, hydroxy, alkoxy, alkylthio or amino; and R^5 is hydrogen, (C_1-C_6) alkyl, hydroxy-, alkoxy-, or alkylthio-substituted (C_1-C_6) alkyl, or R^6 and R^7 taken together complete an alicyclic or heterocyclic system;

each of D^1 - D^n is $(CR^6R^7)_z$ where R^6 and R^7 are as defined above;

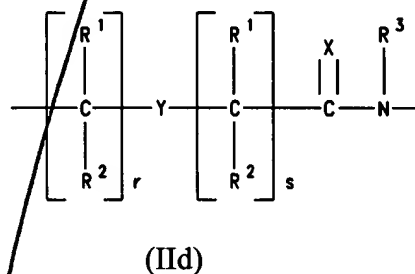
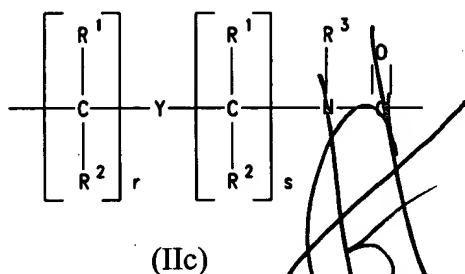
each of y and z is zero or an integer from 1 to 10, the sum y + z being greater than 2 but not more than 10;

each of G^1-G^{n-1} is $-NR^3CO-$, $-NR^3CS-$, $-NR^3SO-$ or $-NR^3SO_2-$, in either orientation, where R^3 is as defined above;

each pair of A^1-A^n and B^1-B^n are selected such that:

(a) A is a group of formula (IIc) and B is N or R^3N^+ ; or

(b) A is a group of formula (IIId) and B is CH_2 ;



where:

X is O, S, Se, NR^3 , CH_2 or $C(CH_3)_2$;

Y is a single bond, O, S or NR^4 ;

each of p and q is zero or an integer from 1 to 5;

each of r and s is zero or an integer from 1 to 5;

each R^1 and R^2 is independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, (C_1-C_4) alkyl which may be hydroxy- or alkoxy- or alkylthio-substituted, hydroxy, alkoxy, alkylthio, amino and halogen;

[each of G^1-G^{n-1} is $-NR^3CO-$, $-NR^3CS-$, $-NR^3SO-$ or $-NR^3SO_2-$, in either orientation, where R^3 is a sterically bulky substituent containing 3 or more non-hydrogen atoms;]